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ABSTRACT

A central concern of educational innovation is making instruction relevant to the needs and learner characteristics of individual students generally and of special subpopulations of students in particular. Current schooling often involves inappropriate learning goals, ineffectual curricular and instructional materials, discriminatory organization for instruction, and authoritarian and hostile social/emotional school climates. The participants in the training programs concerned with local educational change were introduced to the concerns for relevance as related to teaching problem-solving thinking, stressing personal/social development, organizing and conducting instruction for mastery of learning tasks, and individualizing instruction. The training programs stressed that students, instructional staff, administrative staff, and community members should be involved in the developmental, the implementation, and the evaluate stages of the local educational programs. The long term program offered intensive training for leadership in designing and conducting change programs meant to increase the relevance of instruction offered inner-city children. Related documents are EA 004 408, EA 004 409, and EA 004 411. (Author)

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RESEARCH TRAINING THROUGH A MULTIPLE SYSTEM CONSORTIUM: SIX PAPERS

1. The Pittsburgh-Based Project to Train Educational R&D Personnel. Glen Heathers

2. Methodological and Theoretical Bases for Designing Local Educational Change Programs. J. Todd Simonds and Theodora St. Lawrence

3. Making Local Change Programs Relevant to Students' Needs. John L. Morgan and Alfonzo Washington

4. The Design of Programs to Train Personnel to Develop and Conduct Programs of Local Change. Robert F. Nicely, Jr.

5. Individualizing Guidance and Training of Local Change Specialists. Hiawatha Fountain

6. Evaluation of Programs to Train Educational R&D Personnel. Jane P. Woodward and John L. Yeager

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MAKING LOCAL CHANGE PROGRAMS RELEVENT TO STUDENTS' NEEDS

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MAKING LOCAL CHANGE PROGRAMS RELEVANT TO STUDENTS' NEEDS

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A central aspect of the training being offered local change specialists concerns ways of making instruction relevant to the needs and learner characteristics of students generally and of special subpopulations of students in particular. This emphasis is in response to the nation-wide critique of most schooling as being both inappropriate and ineffectual. Viewed in terms of the needs of individual learners, goals of instruction often are wrong, learning materials inappropriate, organization for instruction discriminatory, instruction ineffectual and boring, and the social/emotional climate of the school authoritarian and hostile. In response to such shortcomings, many students tune out, drop out, or rebel. Increasingly, community members are turning from apathy or passive accommodation to such faults of schooling toward demanding that the schools provide effective instruction. This is particularly the case in the inner city were minority groups are militant in their demands for relevant schooling.

Yet with the changing of roles of communities and the nation-wide critique of our educational systems, the schools remain relatively unchanged.

> "There is an obsession with power and discipline everywhere; for most American children there is essentially one public school system in the United States, and it is authoritarian and oppressive. Students everywhere are deprived of the right to make choices concerning their own destinies."
> (Kohl, 1969, p. 12)

Within the confines of public schools, colleges and universities, society has built oppressive structures to educate its members. These demeaning,

destructive, and conforming structures have been attacked by the very issue society bears, its children. Students, teachers, psychologists, and historians have emphatically stated the need for some change or reorganization of society's present system of educating its members.

> "The school system functions as a monopoly and, being protected from competition, often lacks the necessary impetus to reform itself. Many of the ills ascribed to students, classroom teachers, and principals can be traced like a red thread to the inherent defects of school systems designed to perform functions that are no longer relevant to the times." (Cuban, 1970, p. xxi)

The educational expectation society has for its members cannot be met in the structure of the schools today.

> "The authoritarian environment of the school I taught at encouraged a collusive atmosphere in which everyone except the students pretended that school was functioning smoothly and effectively and that the teachers were 'doing a good job.'" (Kohl, 1969, p. 12)

The cry of some students today is for relevant curriculum and total involvement in the educative process. To have relevant curriculum and student involvement implies the creation of an environment where responsibility for the educative process is shared by all involved in its formulation and implementation.

> "My experience as pupil, teacher, and listener to other people's comments attest to the observations that the curriculum is frequently unauthentic (both objectively and in the pupils' frames of reference), remote in one manner or another, arbitrarily selected, arbitrarily organized, inconsistent with natural learning, vacant of systematic study by the learner of himself, composed in absentia, preordained, unresponsive to the learner's individual requirements--goals are generally uniform: the same outcomes for everybody heavily invested in substantive content, and principally directed toward the learner's

> "acquisition of correct and authoritative answers, infantilizing, and as likely to stunt intellectual capacities as to enhance them." (Goldhammer, 1969, p. 10)
>
> "The teacher-dominated, text-bound, student-recitation type of classroom has not yet met the needs of low-income youngsters or for that matter, of most children. It has failed to stimulate or educate. Such instruction ultimately alienates students and convinces them that what happens in school is divorced from reality." (Cuban, 1970, p. xxi)
>
> "There are too many artifical barriers erected by the school system that keep students at arm's length from teachers and reduce learning to dealing with trifles." (Cuban, 1970, p. 20)
>
> "An approach that maximizes interaction between teacher and student, between student and student, that draws ideas from students rather than pouring facts into them, will engage children and motivate them to learn." (Cuban, 1970, p. 20)

Many critics see the need for creating a learning environment where the student can make some decisions about his learning. Within an environment where students can make decisions about their learnings, there should exist a helping relationship between teachers and students, and between students and students. This helping relationship will allow individuals in a learning environment to perceive each other as peer resources.

Combs, too, implies the importance of self awareness and relationships between humans. Combs (1970) states that in the kind of self concepts we seek lie the basic criteria for curriculum change and improvement. Other critics of our educational system perceive change in the schools as a setting where students are responsible for some of their learning experiences. They call it an open setting, a setting where the learning experiences are designed jointly with instructors or where the learning experiences are designed by individuals for themselves.

Within an open setting where helping relationships exist, each member is responsible for: maintenance of the setting, direction of learning experiences, location of resources, evaluation of self, evaluation of learning experiences and setting of new goals.

> "Let me define a bit more precisely the elements which are involved in such significant or experiential learning. It has a quality of personal involvement--both his feeling and cognitive aspects being in the learning event. It is self-initiated. Even when the impetus or stimulus comes from the outside, the sense of discovery, of reaching out, of grasping and comprehending, comes from within. It is pervasive. It makes a difference in the behavior, the attitudes, perhaps even the personality of the learner. It is evaluated by the learner. He knows whether it is meeting his need, whether it leads toward what he wants to know, whether it illuminates the dark area of ignorance he is experiencing. The focus of evaluation, we might say, resides definitely in the learner. Its essence is meaning." (Rogers, 1969, p. 5)

Therefore, change in an open setting is not brought about by external factors of pressures working on systems or people. Change is fostered by an internal pressure or awareness. It begins in one individual with that individual's awareness of self, and moves continuously to others. This movement can be rapid or slow depending on the change agent's initiative, commitment, and skills.

Change--meaningful and beneficial change--will occur when someone takes the initiative to provide xperiences for people to examine themselves and the systems in which they hold membership. Change occurs when those individuals who are part of total systems become aware of the need for change.

Some say we lack the ability and resources to meet the changing needs of our educational system. The writer believes that national and local

resources for change are not lacking. If one person changes his approach to teaching or a community focus on a change program, a whole system can change without specific federal or state funds. Therefore, to make local change programs relevant to students' needs, the schools must become more humane and re-examine its goals in relation to students' needs.

There are several major change strategies possible for making local change programs relevant to students' needs. Among these are organizational change, architectural change, curriculum content change, curricular organizational change and teaching methods change. All of these changes, none of which are detailed here, need the intervention of human change agents in the environment of the schools to become a reality.

The complex web of forces acting on our educational system, often forcing people into hostile, rigid, defensive postures, seems to be so great that almost any proposal for making local change programs relevant to students' needs appears to be weak and inadequate. There is no stronger weapon than an individual or a community focused on making local change programs relevant to students' needs. These individuals or community members, trained in the management of change and having the skills of self-understanding, self-involvement, and self-direction, can cope with the educational system and be accountable for local change programs being relevant to students' needs.

The participants in the training programs concerned with local educational change were introduced to the concerns for relevance as related to a number of themes of today's educational reform movement. These thems included teaching problem-solving thinking or inquiry, placing stress on personal/social development (the affective domain), organizing and conducting instruction in ways that enable all students to master learning tasks, and

individualizing instruction to insure that the goals and methods of instruction suit each participant. In relation to each of these themes, participants were taught to analyze and evaluate current instructional programs, to identify ways in which instructional programs can be improved, and to work with community representatives and school staffs in designing and conducting the needed change program.

In order for program participants to perceive the training as relevant to their needs, the training programs themselves were designed according to those reform themes. This meant allowing time for mastery of instructional units, providing units designed as a result of student needs, providing a climate that was open and free for participants to make some decisions and developing the appropriate relationships between participants and program staff.

The training programs used their instructional settings or learning environments as a demonstration of the value of making local educational change programs relevant to students' needs. These learning environments stressed some things that should be considered when making educational programs responsive and accountable to the clients they serve. They stressed the involvement of all persons that the programs would effect. This implies that students, instructional staff, administrative staff, and community members should be involved in the developmental, the implementation, and the evaluative stages of the local educational programs.

The long-term program also offered intensive training for leadership in designing and conducting change programs that are meant to increase the relevance of the instruction offered inner-city children. The training includes work with various change programs that influence all components of

the instructional system: curriculum, organization for instruction, school facilities and equipment, staff selection and assignment, instructional methods, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, programs for special groups, interpersonal and intergroup relations, and school/community relations.

An important way in which the training programs are ensuring attention to the instructional needs of students from the inner city is through recruiting. All trainees who participated in the initial presentation of the short-term program for educational leaders of community action agencies are Black, as are three of the seven trainees in the long-term program in the design and conduct of local change programs.

The relevance questions, essentially, applies to students from all population subgroups, middle- and lower-class Whites as well as racial or ethnic minority-group members. Trainees are being offered instruction through course work or job experiences that prepare them to view broad problems of educational change first as they involve all students, then as they especially involve selected population subgroups.

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